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ABSTRACT

A course in English as a second language for international graduate student instructors at the University of California at Berkeley is described. In its first offerings, the course served students from three Asian countries and a variety of disciplines. It consisted of work in language, culture, and instructional techniques integrated into all class activities. The activities included videotaping and reviewing of class presentations, viewing tapes of other graduate student instructors in the process of teaching, pronunciation instruction, panel discussions, roleplaying, special events focusing on cultures, discussion of readings, classroom observations, and instruction in classroom techniques. After the course, students expressed increased confidence and appeared to understand the importance of interaction in the American classroom. Most appeared to have the same language problems with which they began the course, but had learned compensatory strategies for improving communication. The course instructor learned, through this experience, that the students do not need better control of English as much as they need to create interaction in the classroom. Planned adjustments in the course include increased videotaping and viewing and increased pronunciation instruction. A course syllabus is appended. (MSE)

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The University of California at Berkeley
Subject A for Non-native Speakers of English
February, 1988

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DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF TRAINING COURSE FOR INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS

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Submitted by Helen Fragiadakis, Lecturer

FL017206

In early 1987, Subject A for Non-native Speakers of English was asked to develop and offer a course for international Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs). The course was piloted in the summer of 1987 and offered for the first time fall semester, 1987. This document is a description and evaluation of those two classes.

Characteristics of Students

Departments:

Summer:			Fall:		
	EECS	4		Chemistry	3
	Bus. Adm.	2		Math	2
	Statistics	2		Statistics	2
	Mol. Biol.	1		Biophysics	1
	Sociology	1		Physics	1
	Poli Sci.	1		Optometry	1
	Nat. Res.	1		Mech. Eng.	1
	Mech. Eng.	1			11
		13			

Native Countries:

Summer:			Fall:		
	PRC	5		PRC	10
	Taiwan	4		Taiwan	1
	Korea	4			

Instructor's Subjective Ranking of Language Proficiency
(student/years in the U.S.)

Very Low (N=3)	Low (N=4)	Mid (N=6)	High (N=11)	
A/4.5*	D/6**	H/11	N/7*	S/1*
B/<1	E/1	I/8*	O/7*	T/1*
C/<1	F/<1	J/2	P/6	V/1
	G<1	K/2**	Q/3	W/<1*
		L/1	R/2**	X/<1**
		M/1		

*Had served as GSI before course
**Served as GSI concurrent with taking course (fall only)

Rating	Intelligibility	Would this student pass a performance test?
Very Low	Rarely intelligible; listener would be likely to give up	No
Low	Occasionally intelligible if listener makes a real effort to understand	No
Mid	Intelligible if listener makes some effort to understand	Maybe
High	Intelligible; listener needs little effort to understand	Yes

Hours/Units of course

The summer pilot met four hours per week for no credit. The fall course, Subject A 310, initially met four hours a week and was to receive four units of credit, but it became clear that the students in the class were unwilling to devote that much time to the class because of their heavy schedules (five of the students were already GSIs---four in the classroom and one in his office). We then asked for and received permission to offer the class two hours a week for two units. However, it gradually became apparent that two hours a week did not allow enough time for adequate, continuous language practice.

Realizing that Subject A 310 was not a typical 300-level course because it requires language work, and finding that it did not receive enough workload credit to allow for all the necessary work to be done, we requested that it become part of Subject A 35, our oral communication series. Starting spring semester 1988, the international GSI training course will be called Subject A 35C, carry two units of credit, and meet three hours a week.

Course Activities

Work in language, culture, and pedagogy, the three main areas of the course, was integrated into all of the activities described below. Language instruction, especially, took place on an ongoing basis. The course syllabus appears at the end of this appendix.

Videotaped Presentations followed by Individual Conferences

On the end-of-course questionnaire, students unanimously agreed that the most useful activities were giving videotaped presentations and having follow-up conferences with the instructor. Most presentations involved interaction with the "audience" so that students had practice asking, restating, and answering questions. The following were the presentations each student made, either in the summer, fall, or both:

- defining a technical term or explaining a concept to a class (pretest)
- handling the first five minutes of the first day of class
- explaining a problem while involving the class in the explanation
- explaining an especially confusing point from a past or future lecture
- repeating a presentation already given (posttest)

The first videotaped presentation was used to diagnose each student's problems in the areas of language (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary), non-verbal communication (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions) and teaching techniques (e.g., using the board, handling questions). In the initial conference, students viewed their videotapes with me and received a written list of points that needed attention. For example, a student might have been told to work on:

- speaking more slowly,
- raising the pitch of stressed syllables in content words,
- putting words into "thought groups" in order to improve sentence rhythm,
- stretching out long vowel sounds,
- producing the TH sounds,
- facing the class more,
- smiling occasionally,
- writing on the board in an organized way, using labels as much as possible.

I explained during the first conference that working on language entailed developing a self-monitoring system which involved becoming conscious of language form and attempting self-correction whenever possible. Monitoring occurs, for example, when a student says, "My office hour is...uh...My office hours are...."

Before each subsequent videotaped presentation, the students were given instructions to work on specific points that had been discussed in conference. For instance, for a specific presentation, the student given the list above might have been given instructions on a 3x5 card to (a) speak more slowly, (b) put words into thought groups as much as possible, (c) face the class more and (d) use good board organization.

During each presentation, in order to increase interaction, the class was instructed to ask the presenter questions and the presenter was expected to ask questions to check comprehension. I also asked questions when I understood the material well enough to do so, and I also encouraged the undergraduate video camera people to become involved if they could.

After each presentation, I commented on general language problems that I felt were common to most of the students in the class, and we analyzed the presenter's use of the board.

Later, in an office conference, I worked with each student individually, going over his or her videotaped presentation, looking at forms filled out by two classmates evaluating the presentation, and discussing their comments. It was during these conferences that the students received intense individualized pronunciation practice and language instruction. A number of students actually audiotaped these meetings so that they could practice at home. The students, by their informal comments and their end of course ratings, found the conferences extremely helpful.

Viewing videotapes of other GSIs teaching

The best set of GSI teaching tapes I know of are those provided by Professor H. Wu of the math department. Both the students and I found these tapes to be very realistic and a good source of models. We focused especially on the interaction between the GSI and the class.

During the summer and for part of the fall semester we viewed a number of tapes from the UCLA Mastery Teaching Series. Although the content of the tapes was somewhat useful, neither the GSIs nor I were pleased enough with the tapes to continue to use them.

Other Course Activities

Pronunciation: While most direct pronunciation instruction took place in conference, we did use some class time to go over the vowel chart and the basic rules of stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Students were expected to list, in writing, technical terms frequently used in their fields and provide me with blank cassette tapes so that I could provide them with models. They were then expected to practice pronouncing the terms outside of class. If they wanted to, they were welcome to record and hand in short bits of informal conversation which I analyzed and responded to on tape.

Panel discussions: During the summer course, we had two panel discussions. In one, those who had already been GSIs spoke for three minutes each on what they considered valuable advice for a new GSI. A question and answer period followed. In the other discussion, three guest undergraduates answered questions from the class about the "typical American student" and other cultural issues.

Roleplaying: Students also had opportunities to roleplay various academic interactions with other GSIs, with students and with professors. For instance, they roleplayed a situation in which, as a GSI, they had to deal with a student complaining about a grade.

Special events: In order for the students to get to know and better understand undergraduates, we once combined our class with members of an undergraduate Ethnic Studies class. For almost two hours the students discussed their cultures in pairs or small groups. In addition, our class had a visit from a member of the Graduate Assembly who talked about the American undergraduate.

Discussion of reading materials: When time allowed, we discussed material from the reader pertaining to language, culture, and teaching strategies.

Classroom observations: The students were required to conduct three observations of classes similar to those that they were teaching or going to teach and to write a brief report on each. They were asked not only to observe the teaching techniques used by the instructor but also to evaluate the general classroom climate and the behavior of the students. These observations often brought out cultural differences in the classroom which we could then discuss in class. Another benefit of observing classes is that by listening carefully to the language of the classroom as it is used by native speakers, the students can increase their own linguistic repertoire.

What the Students Learned

Overall, I feel that the students made progress and were quite satisfied with the course. The following are examples of comments that students wrote on their course evaluations:

> I know more techniques to teach, for example, how to use the board, introduce myself, check the student's comprehension, lead the discussion. I have also improved my pronunciation and learned a lot about American culture.
>
> I learned board use, interaction, etc. and used these techniques in my TA sections.

Confidence

A section on "confidence" was not listed in the syllabus, but most students said they had gained confidence from taking the course. Some admitted that when they started, they were avoiding using any more English than necessary because of their lack of confidence. One GSI, whose English was actually quite good, had used his lack of confidence as an excuse for not engaging in small talk with his students or asking them questions.

Language

The communication skills in English of some of the students in the course, including some new to the U.S., were excellent. Conversely, there were a few students whose English was almost unintelligible, including some who had been in the U.S. for a number of years. The latter students need intensive language work if they are to be easily understood. In one case, a student said he does not speak clearly even in his native language.

For the most part, at the end of the course, the students still had most of the same language problems they started with. However, judging by their posttest videotapes, it seems that the compensatory strategies that they learned, such as using the board more efficiently and increasing eye contact, helped them communicate more effectively. In other words, improvement in non-language areas made language seem better because the listener was not totally dependent on the language to understand the message.

Additionally, many of the students had developed an awareness of what they needed to continue to monitor. When the course ended, most of the students demonstrated that they were doing more and more self-correcting. They came to realize that it takes a long time to make improvements in structure and pronunciation automatically without thinking.

Besides learning to correct what language they already knew, the students also worked on acquiring more vocabulary. They learned numerous classroom phrases, such as those that help them ask questions, give positive feedback, deal with incorrect answers, and signal movement from one activity to another, for example: "Did you follow the part about...?", "That's a good point!", "Not exactly," and "Now let's turn to...."

Culture

By the end of the course the students seemed to better understand the importance of interaction in the American classroom and had become more aware that teachers in this country are expected to be not only experts in their fields and managers of their classrooms but also people who take an interest in their students. This became especially evident to the students as they read comments, such as the following, about award-winning GSIs in the Department of Chemistry:

- She was always cheerful and would tell us not to get discouraged.
- Very personable and easy to talk to.
- He really cares about his students and is very friendly.

The students learned that by making an effort to smile and be friendly, they can soften some of the formality that they bring to the classroom.

Teaching Strategies

The course included concrete techniques on how to run the first class, deal with problem students, use the board, check student comprehension, and increase interaction within the classroom. We devoted a considerable amount of time to practicing how to restate questions, a technique especially important for international GSIs who, because of problems in listening comprehension, may give answers to questions that have not been asked because they have misunderstood the questions.

What I Learned from Teaching

Perhaps the most significant discovery I made is that the major problem of most of the international GSIs in my classes was not their lack of control of English but their lack of awareness of the need to create interaction in the classroom.

I realized the existence of this problem as I was conducting classroom observations of the GSIs in my course who were currently teaching. Some of them seemed to do most of the talking when they were teaching and did not ask either enough questions or the right types of questions to force their students to participate in the process of solving problems. When I asked them why they didn't involve their students more, they explained that they didn't feel they had the time, given that they had to cover a great deal of material. Later, when we viewed videotapes of American-born GSIs in the math department, the students in the training course were able to see how it is possible to keep up a fast pace in class while still involving students. For example, one GSI on tape, while working out a problem, kept turning to the class, expecting students to complete his sentences for him.

While I realize that it may be possible for any new teacher to have difficulties asking the right questions and involving their students, I believe that this problem is compounded for the international GSI who has a lack of language facility and cultural knowledge. I expect that if the international GSIs I have come to know increase the amount of interaction in their classrooms and show their students that they are interested in their progress, their lack of language proficiency will recede in importance, and, as a result, they will become more successful instructors.

I was quite surprised to find that some of the students in my classes lacked very basic knowledge about the campus. For instance, one GSI stated that he always started class "ten minutes late," at 2:10, because the students needed time to walk from one class to another. He had thought that classes started on the hour, and, in fact, there were other students in our class who had the same impression. I was surprised again when a statistics GSI from China, who had already taught for two semesters, did not know the meaning of the expression, "to grade on a curve." (This student had arrived in the U.S. on September 1st and started teaching on September 2nd.) And I was surprised when some of my students who had been GSIs in the past revealed that they were unaware that they could, and in fact, were expected to, look at their student evaluations.

What I Learned from Observing International GSIs Teach

In order to develop a course that would realistically meet the needs of Berkeley's international GSIs, I spent time observing my students teaching their own classes and also looking into campus GSI training resources.

The problems I noticed while conducting observations of my students (aside from the lack of interaction described earlier) were that they occasionally:

- answered their own questions after having given their students little or no wait time;
- were unsure about the pronunciation of their students' names;
- gave unvaried and an inadequate amount of feedback. For example, one student used "right" as his only response to correct answers;
- didn't use the board enough or in an organized way;
- failed to adequately check students' comprehension and instead relied almost entirely on asking, "Any questions?"

Because the students who were teaching were among those with the highest language proficiency, it came as no surprise that I didn't observe any communication breakdowns while they were teaching.

But I was surprised at the distractions the GSIs tolerated in the classroom. In one case, latecomers, arriving at different times, slammed the door and then walked up to the GSI's desk to hand in and pick up homework, making noise while they were shuffling through papers. I also noticed students reading the Daily Californian and talking to each other while the GSI was teaching, and in one class a student had his feet on the small seminar table. The GSIs didn't seem at all bothered; they attributed this behavior to American informality. This made me think that we needed to discuss when informality borders on rudeness.

By visiting the 300-level course offered by the math department, I had the opportunity to see what a professor considers valuable in a GSI. It was quite clear, when he faulted a nonnative speaker of English for not learning the pronunciation of a common math term, that he believed that it was important to pronounce technical terms correctly. Also, in a videotape of a GSI teaching, he pointed out how a class seemed lost and emphasized how important it was to be aware of whether or not a class was following an explanation.

I also studied videotapes of American-born GSIs in order to select teaching segments to show my students. These segments are extremely valuable because they reveal the level of formality, the amount of interaction, board and language use, non-verbal behavior, the stating of objectives, question handling, etc. And throughout the past eight months I have consulted with various faculty members on campus and kept abreast of the literature on TA training from around the country. I can use this information in future offerings of this course.

Changes Planned for Subject A 35C

When Subject A 35C meets twice a week, for an hour and a half each time, the major classroom activity will still be the videotaped presentations which encompass the three major areas of the course. We might even have "retakes" of parts of presentations, an idea suggested by a GSI who wanted to have a second chance to teach the same material soon after receiving feedback.

I will continue to be on the lookout for videotapes of experienced GSIs in different departments at UC Berkeley. Such tapes are extremely valuable to international GSIs because they display not only pedagogical but also cultural and linguistic behavior which can be analyzed.

Finally, I plan to devote more class time to pronunciation. I will, however, try to impress upon the students early in the semester that without strong perseverance they will not be able to markedly improve their pronunciation in one semester, that they will have to realize that no one can change their pronunciation for them and that they will have to develop a monitoring system of their own speech that they will need to use whenever they speak.

SYLLABUS
SUBJECT A 35C
ORAL COMMUNICATION FOR INTERNATIONAL GSIs

The curriculum integrates language, culture and pedagogy.

Language

- Identification of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary problems which impede communication.
- Strategies for monitoring and self-correcting speech.
- Pronunciation of technical and general academic terms.
- Language for classroom communication, e.g.,
  -restating
  -paraphrasing
  -summarizing
  -asking for clarification
  -checking and showing comprehension
- Paralinguistic aspects of communication, e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, gestures.
- Active listening skills.

The Culture of the American University Classroom

- Cross-cultural differences in the communication styles and behavior of students and teachers.
- The role of a GSI at UC Berkeley.
- Expectations of undergraduates at UC Berkeley.
- Academic preparation in the American high school.

Teaching Strategies

- Asking and answering questions.
- Checking student comprehension.
- Providing appropriate and meaningful feedback.
- Explaining, reviewing and previewing class material.
- Stating class objectives.
- Leading an effective class discussion.
- Starting and ending a class and providing transitions from one activity to another.
- Presenting material in an organized way.
- Using the blackboard appropriately.
- Increasing student motivation.
- Establishing good rapport with students.
- Conducting conferences with students.

Activities in the Classroom

- Ongoing work on language problems in the context of all other activities.
- 5-10 minute videotaped student presentations with audience interaction every other week, to be individually analyzed, discussed and evaluated with the instructor:

  --defining a term or explaining a concept (pretest)
  --handling the preliminaries of the first class
  --explaining a graph, diagram, table, or describing a process
  --giving instructions to a class
  --leading a discussion
  --presenting a short lecture
  --defining a term or explaining a concept (posttest)

- Viewing and discussing videotapes of successful UC Berkeley GSIs.
- Teaching small groups of fellow students using the skills portrayed in the videotapes of successful GSIs.
- Panel discussions, e.g., students in the class with previous experience as GSIs discussing their experiences, American undergraduates answering questions from members of the class.
- Discussing readings and outside classroom observations.
- Roleplaying specific academic situations.

Activities Out of the Classroom

- Regular conferences with instructor to go over videotaped presentations and receive individualized language instruction.
- Written self-evaluations of videotaped presentations given in class.
- Written observations of lectures, labs and/or discussion sections.
- Reading of articles pertaining to language, the culture of the classroom, and teaching.
- Student-recorded audiotapes submitted to instructor for analysis and correction.
- Pronunciation practice using taped materials in the language laboratory (optional).

COMMITTEE'S EVALUATION OF PILOT TRAINING SEMINAR
FOR INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS

During the summer of 1987, Subject A for Nonnative Speakers of English offered an eight-week pilot course for international GSIs. The purpose of the course, which met four hours a week, was to increase the students' communication effectiveness in the classroom and heighten feelings of self-confidence when speaking English. The curriculum focused on language, the culture of the American classroom, and appropriate teaching strategies.

The committee evaluated the course by administering a questionnaire via the telephone to ten of the 13 students in the class (the remaining three could not be contacted) and by comparing several of the videotapes of subject-matter presentations made by each student at the beginning and at the end of the course.

Seven of the students were in the fields of math or science, two were in Business Administration, and one was in Social Welfare. None was a U.S. citizen, but together they had been in this country an average of four years. (The range was from one to nine.) Seven of the ten spoke Mandarin Chinese as their native language and three spoke Korean.

The students were very positive about their experience in the class, the course content, and their expectations of the course. They all said they would recommend it to students like themselves. The two class activities they found most useful were the videotaping of their presentations and the individual conferences with the teacher.

The before and after videotapes of subject-matter presentations made by each student to the class indicated, in the Committee's view, an improvement in the use of language and the ability to present a subject effectively. Oral language deficiencies, where they existed, were minimized by the presentation techniques the students had learned and developed during the class, e.g., chalkboard skills, discussion skills, voice projection, so that understanding the students was generally not a problem in the final presentations.

Overall then, the pilot seminar was a success, both from the students' perspective and as evidenced by the videotapes. Responses from student interviews are shown below.

Exit Interview Results

Background

Total number of students in pilot course:		13		
Total number interviewed:		10		
Departments of students:	Bus Ad	2	Mol Biol	1
	EECS	1	Soc Wel	1
	Forestry	1	Statistics	2
	Mech Eng	1		

Country of citizenship:	Peoples Republic of China:	5
	Korea:	3
	Taiwan:	2
Native Language:	Chinese (Mandarin):	7
	Korean:	3

Years in USA:	one year:	4
	three years:	1
	five years:	2
	seven years:	2
	nine years:	1
	Average:	four years

Questions

1. What prompted you to enroll in this course?

   2 recommended by a faculty member in my department
   0 friends recommended it or were enrolling in it
   5 felt the need to improve English
   5 other (describe): saw a flyer; saw a campus computer message; have a serious language problem and saw flyer; wanted to improve teaching skills and language;

2. Did you feel any pressure to enroll in this course?

   2 yes (from whom?) myself: lack of teaching experience; because of course work;
   8 no

3. How would you rate your English skills? (1 = poor and 5 = excellent)

a. reading	_____	3	4	3	3	4	3+	4	4	3+	3+	Average: 3.4
b. writing	_____	3+	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	3+	3	Average: 2.8
c. speaking	_____	3+	3+	3	3	2	1	3	3+	4+	3	Average: 2.8

4. What were your expectations of the course?

   • to learn oral English skills (4)
   • learn how to lead discussions and to teach (4)
   • improve presentation skills and methods (2)
   • to learn about American culture (2)
   • to improve oral English and communications skills (2)
   • to learn teaching skills
   • improve pronunciation
   • learn how to use chalkboard
   • improve verbal and presentation skills
   • improve classroom language

a. Which expectations were met?

- all (6)
- some (4)

b. Which expectations were not met?

- none (2)
- writing skills, no chance to write
- more oral presentations; more practice with pronunciation; more idioms
- can't expect too much in 8 weeks
- course too short
- would have liked more language instruction
- didn't have any real contact with undergraduates

5. Thinking back on your experience in the class, can you comment on the aspects of instruction that were

a. most useful:

- videotaping (8)
- individual conferences with instructor (5)
- reading materials (3)
- roleplaying (2)
- teaching exercises and other teaching methods (2)
- discussion on U.S. culture
- learning how to lead a discussion
- reference materials
- instructor tried to individualize instruction
- instructor had more material than time

b. least useful:

- nothing (6)
- discussion of cultural differences in U.S. (2)
- teaching techniques (everybody has his own way)
- pronunciation exercises

6. Would you recommend this course to other GSIs?

9 yes: All GSIs (4); especially foreign GSIs (1); new GSIs (2); GSIs with language problems (2);
0 no
1 depends

7. Will you be teaching this coming semester?

3 yes subject: Stat 153; Bus Ad 120, 121; Stat 210
6 no
1 do not know

8. If "yes", what problems, if any, do you anticipate as a GSI?

_3_ no substantive responses

9. What resources or services would you as a GSI find most helpful or useful?

- have not thought about it
- handbook for TAs and a chance to meet other TAs
- more money
- drop-in center for help with teaching
- more instructional classes on a regular basis
- more videotaping; continue the class with new material
- GSI seminar
- TA conferences to improve instruction

10. Do you have any comments about the course or about the topic of international GSIs?

- make the class smaller (2)
- do more videotaping to improve self
- it is not useful to talk about teaching techniques because everybody has a different style
- add more English oral skills
- the course is very good
- maybe offer a drop-in service
- maybe offer a course with new material
- was pretty helpful for any GSI who doesn't have an idea how to organize lectures, present material, etc.
- pretty helpful and the instructor was pretty good
- teacher handled the class well; class was well organized
- recommend to all GSIs
- instructor was very nice and helpful
- course turned out well
- make it more realistic